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Certified Job Ready Credentialing is Aim of Inmate Employability

By Tommy Hubbs

The California Prison Industry Authority has been busy these days, helping inmate workers find career opportunities prior to parole.

To enhance employability of inmates, PIA has developed the multi-faceted Inmate Employability Program. Aiming to make the factory floor a foundation for skill development and on-the-job training, the program uses its enterprises for more than just production.

IEP has rolled out several credentialing opportunities including programs for its metal factories, laundry facilities, dairies, and optical labs. More are on the way.

"Earning a professional credential is recognition that an inmate's competencies have been validated against a set of private industry standards," explains Mike Colwell, Inmate Employability Program Manager.

"The skills our inmates learn and master in the prison factories, combined with professional education, make them strong candidates for private sector jobs."



Mike Colwell, IEP Manager, discusses the milk pasteurization licensing program with CTF Dairy Superintendent, Ron Higgenbotham.

Moving Ahead

Inmates at PIA's metal factories such as the one at California State Prison, Solano in Vacaville can earn professional certification through the National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS). Two specialties are currently offered: Machining Level I

and Metal Forming Level I. Certification involves meeting industry-established performance requirements and passing a knowledge exam.

"With the NIMS credential, a parolee can go into any metal shop and show they have mastered machining or metal forming. They are ready for the trade," said Colwell. IEP is currently planning for NIMS programs at all five of its metal factories.

Founded in 1995, NIMS is a non-profit organization of metalworking companies, trade associations, and labor unions that support the development of a skilled workforce.

Paul Miller Retires after 40-year State Career



After 40 years in State service, Acting General Manager Paul J. Miller retired in April. Paul began his career in 1963 in the Tabulating Machine Operation at the Department of Motor Vehicles, then went on to the Franchise Tax Board as an Administrator one year later. Paul began his service at PIA in 1987 as a Prison Industries Manager and promoted through the ranks to Assistant General Manager of Operations in 1999. He accepted the Acting General Manager position in June of 2001.

During his retirement, Paul plans on enjoying the great outdoors fishing, coaching little league, and spending time in his woodshop.

No Fluff Course

Also available is higher education for PIA's laundry workers, who are not only washing, drying, and folding clothes these days, but hitting the books as well. PIA has 15 institutional laundries, which process over 26 million pounds of clean linen per year.

Inmates are busy studying chemistry,
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IEP Rolling Out Certification Programs

Laundry, Metal and Optical in Progress...More on the Way

accounting, and linen management through the National Association of Institutional Linen Management (NAILM) certification program.

Currently two programs are available through NAILM: the Certified Laundry and Linen Management (CLLM) program and the Certified Washroom Technician (CWT) program. Both are correspondence courses. Joyce Brannin, Prison Industries Manager, Laundry, is enthusiastic about the NAILM certification. "We're very pleased with the program. NAILM provides course work that is directly related to private sector production laundries," Brannin said. "It's a credible document for our inmate workers to take with them. It is certainly helping them gain valuable knowledge in the field and that will help them greatly in gaining employment."

Certification is available at all PIA laundries with more than 100 inmates enrolled in the program.

Got Certification?

Dairies are also part of IEP's ongoing efforts. Through on-the-job training in PIA's four milk-processing plants, inmates acquire the knowledge and skills to make them pro-



PIA field and headquarters staff gather in Sacramento to roll out IEP's National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS) certification pilot program.

fessionals in the field. A state-issued examination, given by the State's regional dairy inspector, is available at the prison dairies. To date, 11 inmates have received pasteurizer's licenses, recognized at any private industry dairy in the state. "It is another example of providing inmate workers an opportunity to do more than merely work in one of our facilities," said Colwell.

ophthalmic devices, and properly operating ophthalmic equipment.

Employment opportunities and increased earning power await the holder of the optical certificate. A recent survey of optical employers showed that 75 percent gave preference to hiring applicants with certification and paid them a higher starting salary than to non-certified candidates.

Calipatria Celebrates 10 Years



CSP-Calipatria held a Family Night open house in March to celebrate the institution's 10th Anniversary. PIA presented the Inmate Employability Program at the event. Among PIA staff participating are (from left to right): Benny Dillon, PIA Administrator, Keith Archibald, Industrial Supervisor and Inmate Employability Coordinator, Yvonne Wardrup, Supervising Program Technician II, and Bishop Moses, Industrial Superintendent II - Laundry.

An Eye to the Future

The PIA's optical labs also feature credentialing opportunities for inmates working at five different locations in the state. Inmate workers can earn professional certification as opticians through the American Board of Opticianry. To earn the certification, an inmate must pass the National Opticianry Competency Examination (NCOE). The test requires proving proficiency in analyzing and interpreting prescriptions, fitting and dispensing spectacles and other

Partners In Parole

While inmates are busy mastering their skills, the IEP is working in conjunction with the California Department of Corrections "Preventing Parolee Crime Programs." The PPCP focuses on assisting parolees with a successful reintegration into society by providing life skills development and job placement services. The IEP documents and certifies an inmate's skills, work experience, and positive job habits acquired while assigned to a PIA enterprise. That, in turn, is linked to PPCP. Any professional credentials earned by an inmate are part of the package that is provided to the PPCP.

Inmate Employability Works

Possessing certified job skills can mitigate some of the inherent difficulties parolees encounter finding employment. Colwell is certain IEP can make a difference.

"A certification is a real enhancement to an inmate's success upon parole," said Colwell. "Our inmate workers who earn it are ready for good jobs on the outside."